The Night is Long, and Dreams Are Legion

The following story was first published in the Myth Makers *anthology series (produced by Canada's Doctor Who Information Network) in support of* Warring States.

George Morrison, late of Peking, stepped out of the chain station and into Guang Xu Bejing. As with all pre-Republic Chinatown Districts, the chains that linked them to the other Districts in the City of the Saved were only permitted to stop outside the city's towering walls. Morrison limped up the deeply rutted path and waited with peasants and camel-drawn carts to pass through Yungtingmen. A few tourists - two post-humans and a Maori family - waited in a separate line, clutching their red permissions to enter and staring at the white man in the Residents' queue.

From here it was a decent walk up through the Chinese city, thorugh Qianmen and along the purple-shadowed walls of the Forbidden City to his home. His knee was giving him gyp through, the phantom wound still shooting white twists of pain through the ligaments, and he resolved, as usual, to rest for a while at Wong's tea house by Qianmen. There was no bullet lodged in his leg, for all his knew thought otherwise, and that too he blamed on Faction Paradox. Her face, the face of their agent in his time, had been hovering there like a pallid moth when he died.

Except, of course, he hadn't. He had been resurrected in the City of the Saved, the enclave beyond the universe's end where *all* human - and post-human - beings were reborn immortal. He walked slowly up the incline, trying to shake free of his pointless anger. He let the familiar warm rising smell of sesame buns and the bitter undertow of opium welcome him after a day arguing in the offices of *The Original Times of London*.

Every Emperor and Chairman had awoken in ever-lasting Heaven to discover their own Immortal Empire had fallen after them. Each had brought their court with them, although gossip had it that Ch'in was still annoyed about the loss of his terracotta army, and each had set about recreating their world. Some supreme rulers had accepted they were not unique. Puyi, the Last Emperor of the pre-Republics, now worked as a gardener in Kubalai Khan's great pleasure grounds. Others were intractable. Each had their own Districts with their own capitals: from the Kubalai's Ta-Tu, to the Great Hall of the People in Mao 1 and the New Imperial in Pearl Empress 8. And each District, each massive sprawling Empire, was in Soho had been to London in the scale of the City hence becoming known collectively as "the Chinatowns". With death - and war - impossible, the Chinatowns enjoyed a complex and ever-shifting game of political chess.

Morrison, seeking a refuge in his personal hell, had taken up his old job as correspondent for the *Times of London* and moved to his favourite District to report on the intrigues. The First Republic District had asked him to relocate there, but he had felt vaguely foolish living in a street named after himself. Now he passed through the Qianmen and automatically sat down at his favourite table at Wong's.

'Ah, Doctor Morrison! How are you this day! Son! Bring Doctor Morrison's tea!"

Wong sold teas and tisanes from every District: delicate jasmine blossoms grown on a shoreline; dark bitter leaves from within the Manfold; or one of a hundred thousand teas from within the Chinatowns. Wong had come to recognize Morrison's mood, and offer him tea accordingly. If the leg were bad, it was a customized black smoky blend.

'Doctor Morrison?' an English accented voice asked.

The phantom wound was throbbing, its insistent pain like a second heartbeat, so that he scowled as he looked up. In front of him, looking totally at ease in an Edwardian traveling suit, was a Great Detective.

Behind him stood a rather rakish Watson. Morrison cursed: not only was it a Holmes remake, it was an unpopular Roxborough one.

'I'm not a doctor anymore,' Morrison offered. 'If you have come from my wife-'

Morrison had woken on Resrrection Day with a young scar in his thigh and a young woman's face in his mind's eye. He had still smelt incense and gunpowder. Still tasted the horsemeat. Still heard the crack of guns and the screams of the baying Boxer mob as they cut down anyone in their way. Finding himself alone in what appeared to be a London railway terminus hotel had been disconcerting.

It had been nothing to the shock when his wife found him. Everyone came back alone, in an imago created by their own-self image. Many had come back as they had been on their deathbeds, so Morrison, with a clear memory of the Boxer bullet that took his life, was still in his adventuring prime. His wife, a wife he had never even met let alone married, was an old woman. And there were sons he hadn't even conceived of yet, as tall and as old as him. His wife had memories of him dying in an English Edwardian seaside town, not blood-drenched in a makeshift hospital in Peking. If he had died in the Boxer Rebellion, they could never have existed. Yet they did.

They had tried, she from love and he from duty, but he'd said 'Octavia' when he should have said 'Jennie' and they knew she had married a different man. So he had left without a forwarding address.

'I believe,' the Holmes said airily, 'that you engaged us two centuries ago to seek out a woman who was *not* your wife?'

She'd had sharp bones like a bird and had plunged her hands in blood to perform rituals. Her shadow had danced through the horror and it was *her fault* that he had been resurrected out of synch. He had never lived to see the Chinese Republic that feted him. Never had his own blood family.

'It has taken us some time to look through the records,' the Holmes continued, 'and the Rump Parliament are notoriously secretive about their agents' whereabouts but we have checked quite thoroughly. You wanted to find one Cousin Octavia of House Paradox, neé Octavia Sutherland of Edinburgh?'

'Yes.' He recalled a drunken visiphone call, back when he had just left Jennie, and a minor monthly debit by the GDA from his credits.

'She doesn't exist.'

'Everyone exists. Even those damn cultists have been immortalized.'

'Not this one, sir. Normally, they come back, often several times over but she does not exist anywhere in the City.'

Morrison recalled a conversation, late at night when the fires of a burning library illuminating them. Octavia had talked of her desire for immortality, her eyes bright with fervour. And yet here he sat with an ever-lasting emptiness and she was no more than a memory of a wicked smile.